

SS-16 Deployment Raises Senate Questions

Washington—Deployment of approximately 40 SS-16 intercontinental ballistic missiles by the Soviet Union is raising serious questions in the U. S. Senate over whether it is a violation of the yet-unratified second strategic arms agreement.

Not only have the Soviets deployed the 5,000-naut.-mi.-range, solid-propellant ICBM in fixed silos, but the Carter Administration had intelligence information of the Russian move and elected to ignore it in July, 1978, according to congressional officials.

The SS-16 is designed as a mobile ICBM, which is precluded from deployment under the SALT 2 agreement. "Technically, both sides are still operating under the terms of SALT 1 until the treaty now in the Senate is ratified. If the Soviets deployed the SS-16 in fixed silos and used them to replace solid-fueled SS-13 ICBMs as intelligence officials believe, it may not be a violation per se," one U. S. official said, "but it most certainly is a violation of the spirit of SALT 2, if not the treaty itself."

According to U. S. strategic weapons officials, there has been disagreement in the U. S. intelligence community for some time over whether the SS-16 has been deployed in fixed silos in the Novosibirsk area of the Soviet Union. "There is no disagreement about the fact that the Soviets have built about 50 SS-16s, only about the deployment," a congressional official close to intelligence activities said.

The evidence of the SS-16 deployment came from sensitive human intelligence sources on the ground. That sensitivity no longer exists, U. S. officials said. The Carter Administration knew about the intelligence information on the possible deployment of the SS-16, but gave the U. S. negotiating team in SALT instructions not to raise the issue explicitly with the Russians during negotiations because of the intelligence collection techniques used. "The prevailing logic at the time within the Administration was that even though there was some evidence of a deployment, it would not be prudent for the Soviets to make the deployment and risk detection of a glaring violation for a trivial gain, and so there was a tendency to dismiss and ignore the information," the congressional official said.

Questions already have been raised over the Soviet deployment of the SS-20 and its relationship to the SS-16. The Soviets have been deploying the SS-20 for the past year and now have more than 100 of the missiles in place. The Russians claim the SS-20 is an intermediate-range ballistic missile for use in Europe, and it has been excluded from SALT 2.

The questions center on the SS-20, which carries three multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles with nuclear warheads, and the SS-16 because the SS-20 uses the first two stages of the SS-16. The Soviets conceivably could upgrade the SS-20 to an ICBM by adding the third stage and payload.